

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 24

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
9 September 1981

Easing US spy rules — with caution

As much as one might be tempted to shunt aside the issue, the fact is that the United States faces a genuine counterintelligence problem. The problem arises from the openness of American society. For foreign agents openness invites opportunities.

For these reasons efforts by the Reagan administration to relax the rules now in place on domestic spying activities should be subjected to fair measurement by the American people. Civil liberties groups, quite understandably, have expressed sharp misgivings about the proposed changes in domestic spying requirements. Some, but not all, intelligence officials and the administration are eager to relax existing rules so that a larger law-enforcement net can be thrown around foreign operatives (or Americans) engaging in domestic spying against the US.

The objective for Americans as a whole would seem to be twofold. While US procedural requirements should be modified as appropriate to expedite counterintelligence work, such modifications should be made only where absolutely necessary and within the spirit of existing laws.

The new executive order on US domestic spying, which is still in the draft stage, has already been significantly watered down from an earlier version that triggered wide indignation, including that of the deputy director of the CIA, who threatened to resign if sweeping relaxations were made on CIA operations. The revised plan is reported to have resolved areas of ambiguity regarding the CIA and thus, in effect, not altered current

CIA restrictions against domestic spying.

That is as it should be given the CIA's international, as opposed to domestic, jurisdiction. So far as domestic intelligence work by US agencies such as the FBI is concerned, there is no general agreement on the effectiveness of their operations. In this regard FBI director William Webster has testified that he does not see a need for any major revision of counterintelligence guidelines for his own agency. But at the same time the US Secret Service has called FBI guidelines into question after the recent assassination attempt on President Reagan.

One relevant question is the extent to which the new Reagan guidelines may in fact be "cosmetic" in nature, designed as a gesture to those persons on the political right who have called for an "unleashing" of US spy agencies from the post-Watergate-era. The tentative Reagan proposals, which would replace a stringent executive order issued by President Carter in 1978, will give intelligence agencies greater "flexibility" by requiring fewer layers of approval for various US spy operations, according to a Justice Department official. That stress on efficiency seems reasonable, providing — and this would be the key — there is no return to the type of illegal, behind-the-scenes cloak-and-dagger operations of past years. Yes, expedite US counterintelligence activities, but without abandoning the principle that they who are called upon to administer and enforce the law must also obey it. About that there must be no compromise.